CLAIMS:

1. In a slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle, including a body portion with a base, a dome with a finish located above the body portion, and a waist connecting the dome and body portion, the improvement comprising:

a plurality of upright columns extending lengthwise of said dome in spaced relation between said waist and said finish; and

a plurality of recessed panels extending between said waist and said finish, selected ones of said recessed panels being outwardly concave and being adapted to flex in response to vacuum induced in the bottle.

2. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein said columns taper inwardly in an upward direction from said waist.

3. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 2, wherein said columns widen peripherally in an upward direction from said waist and said panels narrow correspondingly in the same direction.

4. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 3, wherein said columns taper inwardly in an upward direction at an angle in a range of about 1° to about 10° relative to a central longitudinal axis of the bottle.

5. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein said columns have lower ends adjacent the waist that taper inwardly and merge into said waist.

6. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein at least selected ones of said panels are outwardly concave between columns adjacent said waist to provide finger-receivable grips.

7. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein said columns have a longitudinal extent about equal to the longitudinal extent of the dome.

8. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein said plurality of panels and columns are five in number.

9. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein said bottle has a slenderness ratio of at least about 2.5, and said dome constitutes at least about 40% of the overall bottle length.

10. A slender, blow-molded, hot-fill bottle according to claim 1, wherein said flex panels in said dome accommodate at least about 90% of the total vacuum absorption requirement of the bottle.

11. A bottle comprising:

a blow-molded plastic body having a dome with an upstanding finish, a base, a substantially tubular sidewall projecting from said base, and an inset circumferentially-extending grip ring extending between and connecting said dome and sidewall;

said dome having an alternating array of a plurality of circumferentially-spaced longitudinally-extending columns and a plurality of circumferentially-spaced panels which extend laterally between and connect to an adjacent pair of said columns;

each of said panels having at least a portion thereof which is outwardly concave, as formed, including an outwardly concave lower section which merges directly into said inset grip ring to provide finger receiving recesses.

12. A bottle according to claim 11, wherein selected ones of said panels flex inwardly in response to a reduction in internal volume when the bottle is hot-filled, capped and permitted to cool, and wherein said columns on opposite sides of said selected ones of said flex panels have an , as manufactured, inwardly concave shape with an upwardly progressively decreasing concave shape that increases as the internal volume of the bottle is progressively reduced.

13. A bottle according to claim 11, wherein said inwardly concave portion of each of said flex panels, as formed, has an upper section which is inwardly concave, and flex panel has an initiator portion that causes the panel to flex progressively inwardly in an upward direction from said waist.

14. A bottle according to claim 11, wherein said dome accommodates at least about 90% of the total vacuum absorption required of the bottle resulting from hot-fill processing.

15. A bottle according to claim 11, wherein a flex panel-to-column juncture is formed between each adjacent flex panel and adjacent columns, and wherein each of said junctures, as formed, defines an obtuse angle that varies progressively along the length of the columns.

16. A bottle according to claim 15, wherein, as formed, each of said adjacent columns widens progressively in an upward direction and their associated flex panel narrows in an upward direction, said obtuse angle at each of said junctures varies along its length with said obtuse angle being greatest where said juncture extends within an upper portion of said dome nearer to said finish than to said base and being least where said juncture extends within a lower portion of said dome nearer to said sidewall than to said finish.

17. A bottle according to claim 16, wherein each of said panels are outwardly concave and have initiator portions that function to cause flex panel deflection to occur progressively in a direction from said outwardly concave portions toward said finish in a controlled manner in response to increasing reduction of internal volume of the bottle.

18. A bottle comprising:

a blow-molded plastic body having a dome with an upstanding finish, a base, and a sidewall projecting from said base toward said dome;

said dome having a plurality of circumferentially-spaced longitudinally-extending columns and a plurality of circumferentially-spaced flex panels which extend laterally between and connect to an adjacent pair of said columns, each of said panels flexing inwardly in response to a reduction in internal volume when the bottle is hot-filled, capped and permitted to cool for accommodating at least about 90% of a total vacuum absorption required of the bottle.

19. A bottle according to claim 18, wherein, as formed, each column extending along opposite sides of each said panels has a lower end merging into said

waist, and the flex panel between said columns is outwardly concave adjacent said waist to provide finger receiving recesses.

20. A bottle according to claim 19 wherein each flex panel narrows peripherally in an upward direction and each column widens peripherally in an upward direction.

21. A bottle according to claim 20, wherein each of said flex panels has an initiator portion which causes controlled inward flexure of said flex panel with increasing vacuum in the bottle.

22. A bottle according to claim 21, wherein each of said panels, as formed, becomes progressively less outwardly concave from said waist and becomes inwardly concave toward said finish.

23. A bottle according to claim 22, wherein said body has an inset circumferentially-extending grip ring extending between and connecting said dome and said sidewall.